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The problems regarding the teaching of low-income children were presented. Formerly, white, Protestant, middle-class norms were forced upon these children, and the teacher who attempted to teach them came ill-prepared for the task. Such innovations as crash remedial courses, pre-school programs, and increased guidance services were effective, but the answer lay in the education of young teachers. The beginning of such education should take place in the teacher-training institutions. A new system of teaching geared to low-income children should be developed that would include more sociology and anthropology. Student teachers should be provided with community field trips, home visits, and student teaching in a variety of situations. They should become well acquainted with the attitudes of low-income pupils. The teacher's education should also include a development of style which would help her have more effective rapport with the class. She should develop a style through the use of role-playing and should practice before she actually entered a classroom to teach.																							
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TEACHERS OF THE POOR

by Arlene Hannah
Frank Riessman

May, 1964

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There is no doubt that poverty in America is a widespread condition. Now we have come to realize that the urban poor, long mute and impotent, have been given a voice through the current civil rights struggle. President Johnson articulated this issue further with his statement of committing this country to an all-out war on poverty.

Earlier President Kennedy expressed his commitment in many ways. Each tells a story about this man. After a particularly grueling morning in his office, he would open the doors, step out, and clap his hands. Then the children from the White House schoolroom would come streaming in to him from all directions, playing leap-frog, hiding under the Presidential desk, and tumbling through the French doors into the sunlit rose garden. After a time, he and the children would return to their duties, refreshed from this interchange. This man had a style about him, and he knew how to summon the children.

What does this capacity to summon the children have to do with poverty? This. A crucial domestic issue lying before us today is the education of all--not some--children. And we have thus far failed in summoning them. Overwhelming statistical evidence in the form of drop-outs, illiteracy rates, juvenile delinquency, etc., bears this out. This failure has been shown most starkly in the education of the poor.

What is there in the monolithic school system that has prevented effective engagement with these youngsters? Partially the fact that the

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system, in the face of the Herculean task before it, has attempted to standardize that which could not be, to establish "norms" which were white, Protestant, and middle-class, and to reward the expeditious-- conformity. But the system doesn't work, and children are not learning. The measuring stick is broken, and until we find a way to a more realistic one, we will have lost the minds and hearts of countless children.

Partially, the problem is with the teacher who comes to the school ill-equipped to teach low-income youngsters. Their world is an alien, fearful and confusing one to her--just as the classroom is to the youngsters. Much of what she has learned in college seems to have limited use with the child who is hungry, burdened with responsibilities at home, and speaks another language (whether that language be Spanish, Chinese, or the language of the streets).

How do we get these two together? How do we get them to appreciate, respect, and really commune with each other as human beings? Many innovations have been offered and some are in process, such as crash remedial courses, pre-school programs, increased guidance services, etc. The validity and vital necessity of these programs cannot be minimized. No one-way street, this, for one cannot miss the underlying implication that the problem is with the individual child and his family; it is labeled psychological impoverishment, sub-cultural deprivation and so on, and that the school is trying in some way to "patch up" what has gone wrong. Certainly the child is impoverished. But the middle-class teacher is as deprived, as isolated, and as disconnected from a large

portion of our society as the child is.

A beginning, it seems to us, must stem from our teacher-training institutions. A new system of teaching geared to low-income children must be developed. Much more sociological and anthropological content must be taught in order to develop an appreciation of other ways of life, other realities. Student teachers should be provided with community field trips, home visits, and student teaching in a variety of situations. Student teachers should appreciate what it means to eat rice and beans every day on a Welfare budget, how it feels to wait five hours in a city clinic, why a family chooses to have a television set to alleviate the pangs of numerous other hungers.

Teachers must be provided with knowledge in many areas about low-income life and styles, particularly its strengths, such as its attitudes towards education, inventiveness, and cooperativeness. This should not be limited to reading behavioral and social science material. We live in a breathing, changing society, and the use of contemporary art forms is an invaluable learning device. Reading Miller's novel, The Cool World, or a seminar-discussion with Baldwin would be much more helpful in evoking an honest realization of the way other people view the world than a dozen courses of traditional methodology. Contemporary film strips, workshops in Negro history, the learning of Spanish, or an understanding of the language of the streets, would all contribute to the teacher's "sensitivity training" with low-income groups.

Another fertile aspect of this that must be tried is the matter of style. We said earlier that John F. Kennedy had a style, a distinctive mode of expression that allowed him to summon the children. It is precisely this art, springing from the unique and intuitive roots of each being, that should be developed by teachers still in college. In visits to schools in thirty-five cities and in many classroom situations, we have always found at least one teacher in a school who, as defined by everyone (children, parents, colleagues, and administrators), was a "good" teacher. Yet the personality of each of these teachers, the manner of approach, and point of view were vastly different.

Our observations have led us to identify at least six types of teachers, and there are probably many more. One such teacher type we call the "boomer." She shouts out, in a loud strong voice: "You're going to learn. I'm here to teach you, and there is no nonsense in this classroom." She lays the groundrules early, and the kids know immediately how far they can go with her. They may not "like" her, but they learn. Now some psychologists and educators might call this person hostile or authoritarian; yet she has learned to use this quality effectively in the classroom.

There is a second kind of teacher who might be called the "maverick." Everybody loves her but the boss. She is upsetting to him because she's always raising "difficult" questions and presenting ideas that disturb. Now this teacher is convinced that ideas are meant to disturb, to stir up,

and consequently she develops a close link with her young and eager students. She is as surprised and curious at each turn of mind, each new discovery, as they, and it is this fresh quality that comes through to them.

Third there is the "coach," an informal, earthy guy who uses his hands, his senses in a very specific way. Sometimes he is an athlete, but more basically he is very physically expressive. This is how he conducts his dialogue with the world, and many low-income youngsters like this. They are able to connect with this quality quickly and in a very natural way--more natural for everyone, really, than sitting still at a desk for two or three unbroken hours.

In sharp contrast is the fourth type, the "quiet one." She is able to accomplish much the same goal by setting herself up as a rational authority through sincerity, calm, and clarity. Dignity pervades this situation and commands from her pupils respect and attention.

Fifth is the "entertainer." This person is colorful, flamboyant and most important, is not afraid to have fun with the children. Frequently he will make mistakes through his sheer flair for the comic. When this happens, he is free enough to laugh with the children at his own blunders. His inventiveness may cause furrows in his supervisor's brow when he has children make airplanes from a reading assignment about air travel. But they learn more about aerodynamics and are much more interested in reading that paper, now flying, than if a traditional method

had been applied. This teacher actively involves the children--their opinions count, and they learn.

The sixth example of a teacher style is that which we call the "secular" type. This teacher is usually very relaxed and informal with the kids. He may have lunch with them or use the students' bathroom. (You would be amazed at how many children do not really believe that teachers eat and sleep and go to the bathroom, just as people do!) This fellow is often very comfortable in talking "turkey" with the kids, not in a mechanical or contrived way, but with a deep involvement in language, its development, and its power. One such person in Syracuse recently became interested in "hip" language, Gerald Weinstein, curriculum coordinator of the Madison Area Project. Instead of using an outdated poem from a standard anthology, he used a poem by the Negro author, Langston Hughes, employing current "hip" jargon. This was the point of departure for discussion. In sharp contrast to the previously indifferent, apathetic attitude, students now were alive, animated and involved. This was their "turf." For some of them, this may have been the first time in their school experience they could exhibit knowledge and have a sense of success.

The Syracuse Herald-Journal (Nov. 11, 1963), reporting this program, stated:

"The enthusiasm of that class session led the students into more of Hughes' poetry. Later they moved into other kinds of literature in more conventional language....

"But the students were not the only ones to learn from that exciting class. Weinstein learned too. He learned the advantage of being familiar with the language of the children you are teaching and establishing a rapport....

"For if a teacher doesn't 'start where the child is,' as Weinstein says, he only reinforces the failure and frustration that has become the normal pattern for disadvantaged students.

"The method applies to all kinds of students. For the student who has read Shakespeare but has not read Langston Hughes, for example, is also disadvantaged."

We begin to see the several possibilities for teacher types and styles. We suggest that development of a style may be essential in making contact with youngsters, and that this can be done through numerous techniques in teacher-training institutions. One such technique is through the use of role-playing for the teacher before she gets into the classroom. Her colleagues could be her class, and the situations varied. The seriousness of the discipline problem could be decreased or increased, the number and types of students could be altered. With the change of situations, the discovery gradually comes that each teacher begins to act as fits her naturally and her actions are partly taken over and modified by what she has read, learned, or experienced. As roles are switched, one's behavioral repertoire is broadened at the same time that attitudinal shifts occur. Through this organic "method acting" approach, the fledgling teacher learns to mold and strengthen her techniques and develop a style.

The common denominator is a deep and utter commitment to engage these youngsters. The crucial ingredient is basic human respect. Miriam L. Goldberg, in a recent monograph on "Adapting Teacher Style to Pupil

Differences," lends further support to these views. She says:

"Perhaps the answer to this question requires the addition of still another characteristic to our hypothetical model, one that is most difficult to teach: idealism, dedication to a cause, the desire to help the have-nots, to render service. That this openness to commitment exists in many young people is confirmed by the large numbers applying for the Peace Corps, preparing for missionary work, choosing to work in settlements, in hospital schools, in special schools for disturbed or retarded or otherwise handicapped children. These young people feel that they are answering a call and they rise to its demands. We have also witnessed such behavior, perhaps too often in times of revolution and war, when young men and women have willingly gone into hardship and danger for what they believed in."

We are now in the middle of a social revolution in regard to the urban poor. Positive and innovative steps, such as have been suggested here, must be taken in order to close the ever-widening gap between teacher and child. If they are not taken, and soon, we will have lost, irrevocably and forever, a tremendous bounty of humanity.